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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: November 26, 2007

Military's Chad Mission Delayed

1. The departure of the Austrian Army contingent's advance party to Chad will not take place today, as originally scheduled. The Commander of the Austrian unit, which will participate in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid efforts in the African state, Lt. Gen. Guenther Hoefler, said the delay was brought about by the fact that several international contingents are currently being deployed to the area. The Austrian troops' transport by air needed to be coordinated with other nations first, he added. Reporting on the delayed deployment of part of the Austrian military's contingent to Chad, where the soldiers will participate in international peacekeeping efforts, mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung points out that "the 18-strong Austrian advance team is 'ready to go' to Africa." The unit's Commander, Lt. Gen. Hoefler, denies that Austrian shortfalls were the reason for the delayed departure. He underscored that "in fact, the EU's command staff has asked to postpone the troops' deployment for bureaucratic reasons." Thus, the Hercules transport aircraft with the advance team will depart for Chad next week.

Wanted: Arabs from Linz

2. ... headlined a leading Austrian daily, and explained that prior to their deployment to Iraq, US soldiers are learning in a training village in Bavaria about how to approach Muslims correctly. Some of the "walk-on jobs" have been given to Austrian citizens. According to a report by centrist daily Die Presse, the casting agency of German security firm DSS is also turning to Austria to hire "extras" to play the roles of Muslim inhabitants in the military's training village near the Bavarian community of Grafenwoehr. At the model Iraqi village in Germany, the US troops are "learning about Arab mentality and culture," Benjamin Reinhardt, the head of the casting firm explained. He added that since the 1980s, such trainings have been carried out for missions in every crisis region, "dismissing as 'incomprehensible' some Upper Austrians' misgivings about what they are describing as 'war castings.'" For three weeks, and in the heart of Bavaria, the walk-ons are playing the roles of Iraqi civilians - from grocers selling fruit to the local police chief, imam or the village's mayor. The US troops are learning how to negotiate with these "locals," and how to respond correctly and prudently in a variety of situations, including protests and demonstrations: "We are trying to be as real-life as possible," after all, "many of the soldiers have never been in contact with a foreign culture," Reinhardt points out.

Muzicant Wins Majority in Jewish Community Vote

¶3. Ariel Muzicant's Atid List has won the majority in Sunday's elections to the board of Austria's Jewish Community (IKG), securing slightly over 41 percent, or ten seats in the 24-seat Jewish Community Council. Thus, Muzicant's re-election as the President of the Jewish Community is considered as good as certain, Austrian media say, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports.

Interview with Ambassador McCaw

¶4. Outgoing US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw gave the final in a series of PAS-facilitated press interviews to a major mass-circulation Austrian daily. The "much-liked Ambassador," who is returning to the United States for personal reasons, is leaving Austria "with sadness," the daily writes. Asked about US-Austrian bilateral relations, Ambassador McCaw stressed that the "relationship is very good. Economically, with about 10 billion in investment, it is as good as never before." At the political level, cooperation between Vienna and Washington has also been "good," although there have been "some challenging issues," such as the OMV's planned gas deal with Iran, Ambassador McCaw noted. On November 25, mass-circulation daily Kurier published the final in a series of PAS-facilitated press interviews with outgoing US Ambassador to Austria Susan McCaw. One of the highlights of her ambassadorship, McCaw said, was the visit to Austria of US President George Bush on the occasion of the US-EU summit in Vienna during Austria's EU presidency in 2006 - the first time in 27 years that a US President visited Austria. Although cooperation between Austria and the US is "good, there were some challenges," such as the Austrian OMV's planned Iranian gas deal: "We discussed this both with the Austrian government and with OMV. The deal is not illegal, it does not break any rules. However, we very seriously want a diplomatic solution with Iran, not a military one." Asked whether sanctions could prevent a potential military operation against Iran, the Ambassador pointed to South Africa and Libya, "where sanctions did work. We do not know the psychology of the Iranian regime, but we need to exploit all options before moving in the direction of a military solution. These (options) include economic sanctions and economic incentives." When the OMV deal was concluded, "Iran boasted about it. That is why the deal was so unfortunate." On how her time in Austria had changed her point of view: "I learned that in diplomacy, it is more important than ever to go and reach out (to people). It is not enough to talk with fellow ambassadors. You need to listen and engage in discussions."

Letter to the Editor

¶5. Austria's largest mass-circulation daily published a letter to the editor by US Embassy Vienna's Chargé d'Affaires Scott Kilner expressing "strong concern and regret over a November 11 column on US Ambassador-designate Charles Gargano," which was written by the newspaper's New York correspondent, Hans Janitschek. The Chargé pointed out that among the key elements prompting the response to the correspondent's column were the facts that the daily is "one of the most widely-read in Austria and one with which the US Embassy has always had good relations." Mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung published a letter to the editor by Chargé d'Affaires Scott Kilner in response to a recent negative column in the newspaper about Ambassador-designate Charles Gargano. The United States, Kilner stressed, "is a strong supporter of press freedom," but the column in question "has nothing to do with serious journalism. It unfairly defames an outstanding American public servant, who served for 12 years as Chairman of the New York State Economic Development Corporation and as Commissioner of the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, with responsibility for rebuilding 'Ground Zero' in Manhattan." Moreover, Mr. Janitschek's article is "simply wrong about several supposed 'facts,'" Kilner continues, and explains: "There is no court case by New York Governor Eliott Spitzer against Mr. Gargano. Mr. Gargano was never proposed as ambassador to the Italian government. There has been no Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing yet on his nomination." The Chargé emphasized the Embassy's "desire to continue a professional relationship with a paper as important as the Kronen Zeitung."

Charles Gargano: Case Dismissed

¶16. ... says a mass-circulation daily, reporting that an inquiry into alleged incorrect financial practices within the Empire State Development Corporation against US Ambassador-designate Charles Gargano was dismissed. After two years, investigations were abandoned, the case was closed, and no charges ever filed. Mass-circulation daily Kurier published a portrait of US Ambassador-designate Charles Gargano, who "loves Europe," according to John Cahill, the former chief of staff of New York Governor George Pataki. Cahill underscored that "US President George Bush's nomination of Gargano as the new US Ambassador to Austria was a fantastic idea." It was former New York Governor Pataki, who, at the beginning of his term of office, appointed Ambassador Gargano, "the real-estate czar and hobby actor to the post of top business advisor for his administration and as CEO of the Empire State Development Corporation." After all, the Kurier noted, Gargano was "one of Pataki's key campaign fundraisers." Cahill continues: "Gargano is a wonderful person; he is charming and has an excellent reputation. Moreover, because of his diplomatic skills he has excellent ties and contacts among Democrats and Republicans alike." Regarding rumors floated in the US media about Gargano's alleged ties with people "suspected of deceptive business practices," the daily reports that an "inquiry into Gargano's business practices was dropped after two years."

Run-Up to Annapolis Mideast Peace Conference

¶17. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has been holding last-minute talks with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators to try to bring about agreement on a joint document ahead of the Middle East peace conference in Annapolis tomorrow. US President George Bush is also holding meetings with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert separately at the White House today. Yesterday, Syria announced it will be joining the more than 40 countries expected to attend the conference. The meeting is the first large-scale round of talks on Middle East peace in seven years, ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal says.

Former PM Sharif Back in Pakistan

¶18. After his return from exile yesterday, former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is expected to file nomination papers today for general elections scheduled for January 2008. He has said he may boycott the election, however, unless President Pervez Musharraf ends emergency rule. Pakistani media have meanwhile been floating rumors of an alleged clandestine agreement between the two "arch-enemies" Sharif and Musharraf, and the Pakistani Chief Public Prosecutor Malik Mohammed Qayyum suggested Sharif's participation in the January poll is "unlikely," liberal daily Der Standard reports.

Kilner